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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001943

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKEY: RESIGNATION OF POLITICAL HEAVYWEIGHT  
FUELS SPECULATION OF TENSION WITHIN AKP

REF: A. ANKARA 1723  
[1](#)B. ANKARA 1935

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: The November 7 resignation of ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) Vice Chairman and party co-founder Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat surprised Ankara's political establishment and engendered immediate waves of speculation. Political circles dismissed Firat's stated reason for resigning -- health problems -- and posited that he had left the party either due to disagreement with PM Erdogan over the PM's handling of the Kurdish issue or because his alleged ties to a corruption had become a thorn in the side of AKP in the run up to March 2009 local elections. Firat's increasing profile in the media linking him to controversial issues -- corruption, the Kurdish issue, constitutional reforms -- probably all contributed to a well-orchestrated resignation plan. AKP members' silence in response to speculation surrounding Firat's resignation demonstrates the continuing tight control PM Erdogan maintains over his party. End summary and comment.

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Senior AKP Leader Resigns  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) AKP Vice Chairman for Political and Legal Affairs Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat resigned from his party position during AKP's Friday, November 7 Central Administrative Board meeting. Firat, an AKP founding member from Mersin and current Adana MP, was considered by many as the most influential advisor to PM Erdogan and de facto number two in AKP. Speaking to reporters following the party meeting, AKP whip Nihat Ergun said Firat resigned his vice chairmanship due to health problems but would retain his MP seat; the move was not part of any cabinet reshuffle. Ergun said AKP had named former Interior Minister Abdulkadir Aksu to replace Firat as Vice Chairman and had also named Bulent Gedikli to replace the recently-resigned Saban Disli as Vice Chair for Economic Affairs.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Firat's stature in the party, as well as his reputation as a somewhat controversial figure, set off a torrent of speculation. Responding to press claims that the PM had in fact forced him out, Firat explained to reporters that he had presented Erdogan with his resignation prior to the board meeting; Erdogan had refused to accept it, but Firat insisted, telling the PM he was tired and not in good health. Asked whether main opposition Republican People's

Party (CHP) whip Kemal Kilicdaroglu's allegations that Firat was involved in corruption (ref A) had influenced his decision, Firat said, "that person would not affect me. Some people may tell lies. He has engaged in slander and I do not take him seriously." PM Erdogan told reporters he had accepted Firat's resignation because Fiat had said he was having health problems.

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Political Theories Abound  
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14. (C) Observers dismissed the explanation that Firat is ill and put forward two main theories for the resignation. (Note: Firat had an operation on his colon two years ago and spent time recovering in the U.S. During our routine contacts with him he has always appeared to be in good health. End note.) The first theory holds that Firat had become disillusioned with the PM Erdogan's approach to the Kurdish issue. Proponents of this theory maintain that Firat, himself a Kurd, disagreed strongly with the PM's approach to the Southeast, as demonstrated by Firat's recent criticism of the PM for hard-line statements he delivered during a recent trip to the region (ref B). Democratic Society Party (DTP) Sanliurfa MP Ibrahim Binici, echoing a refrain we have repeatedly heard from Kurdish contacts in the Southeast, told reporters that Firat's resignation and replacement by the more nationalistic Aksu, shows that AKP has decided to give up efforts to solve the Kurdish issue. The PM had adopted more traditional nationalist rhetoric and aligned with the military in hopes of attracting votes in

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March 2009 local elections. "What they are doing now does not comply with what they had promised in the past," Binici said.

15. (C) Others speculate that Firat was pushed out due to allegations of his involvement in corruption. National Democratic Institute's (NDI's) Dilek Ertukel told us that support for AKP had fallen off in recent polls largely due to allegations that senior party figures, including Saban Disli and Firat, are tied to corruption. CHP whip Kemal Kilicdaroglu had introduced troubling evidence that Firat's MENAS company was complicit in export fraud and drug trafficking (ref A) and Firat had been unable to sufficiently respond. Ertukel said Erdogan is "cleaning shop" in the run-up to March 2009 local elections, adding that it had not helped that Firat had become a controversial figure in other areas as well. "Radikal" columnist Murat Yetken wrote that the resignation was the result of corruption allegations, not the Kurdish issue. Former Cizre mayor Hasim Hasimi agreed, telling us that Firat was not committed nearly enough to the Kurdish issue to resign over the PM's Kurdish policies.

16. (C) In a November 9 telephone conversation, AKP whip Sadullah Ergin told us that Firat's motives were genuine. Ergin called speculation that Firat resigned due to corruption allegations or the Kurdish issue "conspiracy theories." Ergin said AKP had long planned to make a routine assignment at the board meeting to fill the Vice Chairmanship vacated by Saban Disli. Firat had been feeling overloaded with work and his health suffered as a result.

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AKP Opponents Hope Resignation Sign of AKP Decline  
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17. (C) CHP Vice Chairman Onur Oymen told reporters that Firat's resignation was not a mere "change of duty within the party" but showed, "the leaves are falling off the AKP tree." CHP's Kilicdaroglu told reporters he did not know the real reason of Firat's resignation but said that if it is due to corruption allegations Firat made the right decision. Sule Bucak, a former CHP Deputy Secretary-General who left the party with Erdal Inonu to found the Social Democratic

People's Party (SHP), told us the resignation of someone of  
Firat's stature presages further internal conflict within AKP.

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Comment  
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18. (C) Comment: Firat had become an increasingly controversial figure who stood to distract AKP from its goal of dominating March 2009 local elections. In the lead up to the Constitutional Court's AKP closure decision, Turkey's Chief Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya argued Firat evidenced AKP's hidden agenda when he remarked to reporters in New York that Ataturk's comprehensive reforms in the 1920's were "traumatic" for Turkish society. The recent allegations of Firat's ties to corruption that again put him in the public limelight in recent weeks probably led both Erdogan and Firat to conclude that Firat was an impediment to AKP's quest to sweep March 2009 local elections. Coming on the heels of PM Erdogan's recent "love it or leave it" remarks in Hakkari, the resignation also reinforces the notion currently held by many Kurds in the Southeast that Erdogan has shifted from a democratic rights approach towards solving the Kurdish issue to a more traditional military approach. The appointment of former Interior Minister Aksu, a Kurd from Diyarbakir and a former Motherland Party (ANAP) member known for a pro-state approach toward the Kurdish issue, is likely to further solidify this sentiment.

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